Numb. 66

THE OBSERVATOR.

Vindication of the Observator's *Discourse on the Navy. The Sailors Circumstances relating to the Victualling. Of short Allowance and* Pinch-Gut *Money. Of the* Slop-Sellers *Trade.*

From Saturday December the 5th, to Wednesday December the 9th, 1702.

Country-m. MAster *Observator*, I never took so much Notice of the Humours of the People at *London*, as I have done on their Talk concerning your late Discourses of Naval Affairs; the *Jacks* and *High-Flyers* say 'tis none of your Business to meddle with Publick matters, those things are to be managed by the Queen and Parliament; the Publick Officers say you are a Lying Rogue, and that you Question the Reputation of such as the Government has thought fit to Prefer or Continue in Offices: Others say ———

Obs. Hold, Honest *Country-man*, not too fast, I Beseech you; let me Answer the Charge of these people *Paragraph* by *Paragraph*, *Article* by *Article*; I don't love to be confounded by accumulated Crimes: What's the meaning of all this? Am not I an *Englishman?* Have not I a *Right* to *Property*, as well as the best Nobleman in the Land? And may'nt I say what I please in Defence of my Country, and in opposition to such as thro' Avarice, Treachery, or Knavery, would weaken our Constitution, and by *Private Piracies* on the *Publick Treasure*, would impoverish the Nation, the Consequence of which is Slavery to the People? What do I value the talk of *Jacks* and *High-Flyers*? They are such as have misled *Princes* to their Destruction; they are such as have ever Confederated against the true Interest of our Country, they are such as hate the present Government, and do watch all opportunities to embroil the State; they are such whose ill word is a Reputation, and whose Calumnies and Reviling is a Recommendation of a Person to Men of *Probity* and *Honesty*; Good Man, I would not be without their bad Word; if I had their Esteem, I should think my self the most despicable and dishonest Creature in the Universe.

'Tis true, the Navy of *England* is the Care of the Queen and Parliament, more immediately; yet is it every Bodies care, who is a Native of this our Realm. 'Tis our Navy, we maintain it at our Charge, and the Safety of our Nation, the Liberties and Properties of all the good people of *England*, do depend upon it; and so we have the greatest reason in the World to take notice of its management: The Queen and Parliament can never know the Abuses of the Navy, if they are not told of it; and such as are acquainted with Mismanagements ought to make them *Publick*, for the Common good. I have said nothing but what is matter of Fact, and notoriously true; and if Her Majesty or the Parliament will examine into the same, I'll prove it all to a Tittle.

What the Officers say, I don't value one Farthing; I neither Love nor Fear the greatest Knave in *England*; and I can tell you these Men had rather meet my Complaint on a Coffee-House Table, in half a Sheet of Paper, than be obliged to answer to it at the Treasury Board, or at a Committe of Parliament; they very well know the Truth of what I have said, and are very glad that Justice in *England* has so much Lead ty'd to her Feet, as to obstruct the swiftness of her Motions: My Observations on *Publick Affairs* in the short time I have liv'd, have been of a piece, Justice has met with the same Rubbs in its way in one Reign as another, and will never exert it self by a natural Motion, but must force its way thro' the necessity of the *Publick Affairs*: We shall never think well of the *Publick Safety*, 'till we are brought to the last Extremity; and if the *Provision* made for the Navy for the Year ensuing, does not put us upon better Methods, I am as much mistaken as ever any Man can be, in relation to a *Publick Affair*. But proceed with your Charge. What do others say?

Country-m, Why they say what you relate is as true as the Gospel, that if these things be not amended the whole Navy of *England* is sunk at once, that we and our Ships are all Sailing before the Wind to Destruction; that the Empire of the Ocean is lost to *England*, if our Men are not better Used, Paid and Victualled. This is what the Sober sort of people talk.

Obs. And those are the likeliest persons to have true Notions of *Publick Affairs*; for we cannot relye on the Notions of Men who speak thro' Interest, or in favour of a *Party*; and indeed this has been the Embarassment, and will be the Ruine of *England*, if not timely prevented: For when *Interest*, or being of a *Party*, shall recommend a person to a high *Post* in the Navy, without any Respect to his Knowledge or Accomplishments for the *Post* he possesses, the Nation languishes under the Dead Weight of *Private Interest*, and the Sailors lose their Lives by the mismanagements of Men, who are preferred only to get a Livelihood by the loss of other Mens Lives. I don't in the least question the *Prerogative* of the Crown in appointing Officers for places of *Publick Profit* and *Trust*; but the Honesty of those Men is much to be Questioned, who recommend *Persons* for Employments, of whose Capacities, they are altogether Ignorant; especially for Employments on the good management of which, the Lives of *English-men*, and the safety of the Nation so much depends.

I can give no better Instance hereof than in the Victualing, where the Managers have taken more care to acquire vast Estates, than to

to provide wholesome Provisions for the Sailors, by which means, we have lost in 15 years time perhaps more Men than would Man the Royal Navy of *England*. If an Account was taken of the Defective Provisions cast upon Survey in the late Reign, and since Her Majesties happy Accession to the Throne, I make no Question but there have been as much Provisions cast into the Sea, as if it had been well cured would haveVictualed the Navy for 2 or 3 years; but the bad Provisions which have been eaten by the Sailors have done us the most sensible prejudice; for hereby our Men have lost their Lives, a loss altogether irretreiveable to our Country, and for which the Lives and Estates of the Managers can never make the Nation an ample Satisfaction.

It would be matter of the highest Resentment to any true *Englishman* to consider how many Thousands of Sailors were lost in *Nevil*'s Squadron by reason of bad Provisions, when that Squadron winter'd in the *West-Indies*; nor was it reasonable to think that Bread made of Pease and other undue mixtures, should last 12 or 14 Months together in hot Climates.

Country-m. Bread made of Pease! Bless me: Should I put a little Pea into my Servants bread I should want *Ploughmen* to Till my Ground: Does the Nation allow no better *Provision* for our Seamen?

Obs. Yes, Sir, the Parliament allows all Species good in their kind, and a sufficient proportion of *Provisions* for every Sailor in the Navy; but they have been as much cheated of their Provisions both in Quantity and Quality, as they have been of their Pay and Register Money. I cannot find in the History of the Navy of *England*, that ever the Sailors were put to short Allowance in the Channel in view of the most plentiful Country in the Universe, especially in times when the Representative Body of the Nation allowed 12*d.* *per* Man *per Diem* for the Victualing, when former Managers used to Victual at 7*d.* ½*d.* and Contraction never Victualed above 9*d.* *per Diem* charge to the Government.

Country-m. Pray, Sir, what do you mean by short *Provisions*, and short *Allowance?*

Obs. When the Victuallers are short in Stores, then the Sailors must be short in *Provisions*, and so the Sailors are put 6 or 8 to 4 Mens Allowance; and in lieu, of this they have Mony paid them (when they can get it) at about 7*d.* or 8*d.* *per Diem*, when the Nation allows them 12*d.* and this Management has been of a very ill Consequence to the Navy of *England*, for the Money which they receive for short Allowance, and by them is commonly called *Pinch-gut* Money, they Expend in Brandy (which is generally our Malt Spirits sold them by *Bomb-boats*) or on lewd Women; both which enervate their Strength, and render them unfit for Sea Service: When as if they had their *Provisions* in proportion and kind, they would be kept in Heart, and be able to undergo their Duty.

To say our Sailors have been poyson'd by bad *Provision*, would be a hard saying, and esteem'd not worthy of Acceptation, by such who have thought some of the Managers to be the better sort of Christians; but let the Sailors Evidence their *Practice of Piety*, and give the World an Account of their Barbarous Usage. The last Session of *Parliament* a Complaint was made to the House of Commons concerning a Fraud in Her Majesties Brew-house at *Katherines*; and it appeared to that Comm that 26 Barrels of the first Worts were t away from the Sea Beer at every Brewing that suppose they Brewed according to the tient Custom of the Navy 27 Quarter of for 30 Tuns of Sea Beer, then the Sailors of the strength of their Beer one Barrel Quarter save one, and let any one judge w what sort of Beer the Fleet was Victualed that time; and that this had been the *Practice* some time in that Brewhouse, Mr. *Denn* the general Surveyor for the *Excise Office* that Division made it plainly appear to the Committee from the Excise Books, and tho' Complaint was laid before the Commissione of Excise and Victualing and also before then Lord High Admiral, yet no stop was to that abominable Practice, till such Time it was laid before the Parliament; how m the Case is now mended, will appear, if an A count be taken of what Beer has proved d fective, and has been staved since that time.

Country-m. Lord have mercy on the po Sailors, would I have written over every Ship Cabbin Door, *From Plague Pestilence and Famin deliver our Seamen Good Lord!* But Mr. *Observator*, I heard those *People* talk of a sort of Sea Officer they call a Slop-Seller, pray what is that Officer?

Obs. He's the same by Sea, as an Agent to a Regiment is by Land, and e'en just as honest a Fellow. This Office crept into the Navy thro' the Sailors want of pay, for they not being able to buy themselves Cloaths, went quite Naked like a parcel of *Tom of Bedlams*, Mr. *Slop-Seller* took this Advantage of the Sailors Necessities, and so undertook with the Government to Cloath them at what rate he pleased; a very honest Lady, call'd the Dutchess of *Portsmouth*, procured a *Patent* from King *Charles* the Second to Mr. *Slop-seller*, that He and only He should serve the Sailors of the Navy with Slops, so that in Effect his Majesty gave him his Commission to cheat all the Sailors in his Service. For Mr. *Slop-seller* sends a proportion of Cloaths on Board every Ship of War, according to her Rate, and the *Purser* of each Ship is obliged to issue these Cloaths to every Sailor as he has Occasion, according to the Slop-sellers price, for which the *Purser* receives 12*d.* in the pound for his Service herein; and when the Ship comes on call, the Slop-money, is stop'd at the *Pay-Table*, not without Allowance you may be certain: This Affair was before the *Parliament* about two or three Years ago, at which time the Slops aboard Ship fell 25*l.* *per Cent*; so that you may guess what the Sailors paid before that time for their Cloathing; and I cannot find that the *Poundage* on this Account at that time ordered by the *Parliament* to the use of *Greenwich* Hospital, has ever yet been accounted for; and this, Sir, is the State of the Sailors Slops.

Country-m. Then miserable is the State of the poor Sailors.

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